THISWeek

HITS & MISSES REVIEWS BY PAUL DROESCH

Tough guys…Draggy racer… Well-made trash…L.A. tale

Fallen Angels (Sun., SHO)—HBO has *Tales from the Crypt*; this new Showtime anthology series—a showcase for name actors and directors—substitutes *noir* for gore as it celebrates the tough-guy cop films of the '40s and '50s. This week's director, Phil Joanou, takes the kitchen-sink approach to the genre in "Dead-End for Delia": He throws just about every film-noir cliché he can think of into this thin, 35-minute story about a cop (Gary Oldman) on the trail of the killer of his dancer wife (Gabrielle Anwar). It's not a spoof, it's an homage. It looks great and it's fun at first, but then the stereotypes begin to grate. My score (0 to 10): **6**

Born to Run (Mon., Fox)—Richard Grieco, a good-guy rebel in two Fox series (*21 Jump Street* and *Booker*) is a pure-of-heart drag racer who runs afoul of a mob boss in this dark and brooding TV-movie, a sloppily plotted, cliché-ridden ("I run my race my way") exercise in macho silliness. Grieco is appealing, but that's not nearly enough. My score: **3**

Jeff Jarvis is on vacation.

Ray Charles *and* ***Bill Cosby*** *in "Apollo Theatre Hall of Fame."*

Apollo Theatre Hall of Fame (Wed., NBC)—There's plenty of top talent—Diana Ross, Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Al Green, and Ray Charles, to name a few—but this tribute to Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, The Ink Spots, and others never really takes off. Still, *Apollo* has its moments, particularly Charles' version of Paul Simon's "Still Crazy After All These Years" and Shai's tip of the fedora to The Ink Spots, "Java Jive." Bill Cosby and Danny Glover are hosts. My score: **6**

Marilyn & Bobby: Her Final Affair (Wed., USA)—USA doesn't even pretend that this provocative TV-movie is fact-based (a press release calls it "a blend of fiction and speculative journalism"). Ethically, that's pretty scurrilous, so it's too bad that this piece of trash is well-made trash. It moves right along, and Melody Anderson and James F.Kelly are more than believable in the title roles (and Richard Dysart is a wonderfully smarmy J. Edgar Hoover). Why let facts get in the way of a good story? My score: **7**

Alive TV: Punk (Thurs., PBS)—Hot director Carl Franklin ("One False Move" and the HBO movie "Laurel Avenue") doesn't make many false moves in *Punk*, a wrenching cautionary tale about one unusual way that ghetto ills hit home to a South Central L.A. 9-year-old. My score: **9**

Hot Summer Reruns

NBC repeats two of its February sweeps specials: **Lucy and Desi: A Home Movie**, on Sunday; and **Laugh-In's 25th Anniversary**, on Monday. And on a memorable **Simpsons** from May (Thurs., Fox), Marge goes to jail for shoplifting—and Springfield goes to the dogs.

Note: Schedules vary in some areas.

MARILYN & RFK:

THE MYTH AND THE TRUTH

As one more TV-movie chronicles their alleged 'affair,' a biographer says, 'Enough is enough!'

BY DONALD SPOTO

"Discretion advised. The following program completely garbles the truth and invents malicious lies about the character and deeds of real people." More and more, thanks to shows that play fast and loose with facts, this is the kind of warning we ought to be seeing on our home screens.

TV isn't the only culprit, of course. There's a new breed of journalists—and those who call themselves "biographers"—who, in their dash for a swift buck, simply make things up. They "imagine" what people might have thought. Or might have done. The more shocking the possibilities, the better. Never mind that reality gets bent out of shape and unrecognizable. Hey, this kind of thing sells!

But it also strangles our grasp on the truth. It puts down deep roots that get harder and harder to weed out.

Major case in point:

A few weeks after Marilyn Monroe's death in August 1962, a hot rumor was circulating in Hollywood.

A man named Maurice Ries, who thought he saw Communists lurking behind every palm tree in town, was also a fierce Kennedy-hater. "Let's imagine," Ries said, with a mad glint in his eyes, "that Marilyn was having an affair with Bobby Kennedy, and Bobby promised to marry her, and then he changed his mind and wanted to get rid of her. And she was threatening to go public with the story, and the Kennedys had her murdered to shut her up!" It could have happened, Ries told his cronies with a wink—anything could happen. Well, sure, but...and

then, before you could say "conspiracy theory," it was a short jump from "could happen" to "did happen."

"Marilyn & Bobby: Her Final Affair" (USA Network, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 9 P.M. [ET]) calls itself "a blend of fiction and speculative journalism." Keep this in mind if you tune in: It's all mere conjecture, without a grain of truth or accuracy. Although the movie admits that it's just a story, the people are drawn from history, not from a novel—and so it's hard for us to separate truth from fantasy. And what, for heaven's sake, is speculative journalism? More to the point, how can a dramatic movie that blends in fiction be called any kind of journalism?

In this show, the movie star and the Attorney General are portrayed as passionately self-absorbed lovers involved in an affair that leads directly to her death. All this has been told to us before, of course, in imaginative books and made-for-TV docudramas. But everything you see in "Marilyn & Bobby" completely misrepresents the truth. It's all rubbish, as I learned recently when I researched and wrote a biography of Marilyn Monroe.

Why do so many people presume that a beautiful movie star and a handsome politician must have been lovers? And that the affair must have led to tragedy and coverup?

There's no evidence for any of this.

First of all, it's easy to demonstrate that Kennedy and Monroe met only four times and were never intimate. Depart-

Fiction: ***Melody Anderson*** *and* ***James Kelly*** *play the pair as lovers (above left) in the TV-movie. Fact: Below, from left,* ***Bobby*** *and* ***Marilyn*** *chat with* ***JFK*** *at his birthday bash in May 1962.*

ment of Justice travel logs and the daily news reports of RFK's whereabouts disprove the legends about clandestine romantic meetings, as do the FBI's files —which were kept by Kennedy's archenemy, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover would of course have been delighted to confirm any scurrilous rumors about Bobby Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe; he certainly would have known about such shenanigans had they occurred, and he would have used the information when RFK ran for office.

As for Monroe's schedules, they're easy to find, too. Film studio files (which must, for insurance purposes, track the daily location of everyone under contract), the day-to-day records kept by her secretary, and the hourly logs kept by her limousine service—all these documents support the data in the FBI files. There were no romantic meetings for the simple reason that Marilyn and Bobby were separated by thousands of miles.

*The real **Marilyn** (right) and **Melody Anderson** as the TV Marilyn (below): The look is right, but how about the facts?*

Except on four innocent social occasions. The first two meetings took place on Oct. 2 or 3, 1961, and Feb. 1, 1962, when they joined other dinner guests at the Santa Monica home of Peter and Patricia Kennedy Lawford. The third encounter occurred on May 19, 1962, at a dinner and fundraiser at Madison Square Garden to celebrate President Kennedy's 45th birthday. The last meeting between Monroe and Robert Kennedy was on June 27, 1962, again with a group at a dinner at the Lawfords. Everyone who actually knew RFK and Monroe—everyone, not just their friends—agreed that there was certainly no romance between them, much less any involvement of RFK in Monroe's death.

But ridiculous claims to the contrary persist, thanks to rank speculation.

It's been written, for example, that RFK and Monroe met secretly in Los Angeles on Nov. 18, 1961. But on that day Kennedy was in New York, Monroe in California. Others cite a rendezvous on Feb. 24, 1962—but Kennedy was in Germany, Monroe in Mexico. Still others refer to a secret meeting on March 14, but he was in Washington addressing the American Business Council, and she was in L.A. with Joe DiMaggio. And so it goes.

When "Marilyn & Bobby" shows us RFK at Monroe's home on the day and evening of her death—well, this is sheer fiction, too. That entire weekend, Kennedy and his family were 400 miles away

in Northern California, visiting John Bates and his family. At the time, Bates was chairman of the judiciary committee of the Bar Association of San Francisco; to this day, he is a highly respected attorney. Bates, his family, his employees, his ranch foreman, and even the local press (which documented the Kennedy visit in word and picture) have been unanimous for 31 years: RFK could never have left the remote ranch in the mountains, secretly traveled to Los Angeles, and returned. Even FBI records confirmed that RFK was nowhere near Los Angeles at the time of Marilyn's death.

Over a span of more than 30 years, none of the people who were with Marilyn the weekend of her death ever mentioned the presence of RFK in Los Angeles. He wasn't even named by those truly responsible for her death, whom I identify for the first time in *Marilyn Monroe: The Biography*.

People assume that a beautiful movie star and a handsome politician must have been lovers. But there's no evidence that Marilyn and RFK ever had an affair.

Nevertheless, many Americans refuse to give up their strong belief that RFK had a hand in the tragedy. But the plain truth is that there isn't a single credible witness, not a shred of evidence to support such defamation.

How did all this nonsense begin?

With Maurice Ries and company.

It then got a major boost from novelist Norman Mailer, who (in his book *Marilyn*) also imagined a hypothetical connection between RFK and Monroe. But when he was interviewed by Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes* on July 13, 1973, Mailer had to admit that even he did not believe his own foggy ruminations. He said his publisher had offered him quick cash for a bestseller, and the Kennedy–Monroe element easily juiced up the story. Mailer got the quick cash, but the public was hooked on a tall tale.

This whole messy business was further fueled by an obscure fellow named Robert Slatzer, who stepped forward (also in 1973) to allege that Marilyn and RFK had a lovers' quarrel that led to her death. Slatzer ought to know, he said, adding (without proof) that he had once been Marilyn's husband—alas, for less than a week before the bond was annulled. But he insisted that they remained friends right up to her death, and therefore Slatzer was privy to the Kennedy connection.

Interestingly, none of Marilyn's friends ever heard of Slatzer until years after her death. As for the "marriage," documents prove that Marilyn was in Los Angeles at the time Slatzer claimed it took place in Mexico (on Oct. 4, 1952).

Some critics and moral watchdogs have issued loud warnings about TV violence, arguing that it dangerously distorts our view of the world. I agree. But maybe we ought to be just as worried about what happens to all of us when we're served tired old lies—the "blend of fiction and speculative journalism" that warps facts and destroys reputations.

Monroe and Kennedy were not thoughtless victims of their own passions, as books and shows like "Marilyn & Bobby" would have us believe. We owe it to the real Marilyn and Bobby—of history, not of imagination—to accept the truth that there was no romance, that responsibility for her death lies elsewhere.

We deserve to know the truth about people—even at the risk of believing something good about them. ■

Donald Spoto's 11th book, just published, is the international bestseller "Marilyn Monroe: The Biography" (HarperCollins).